

OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIRTH OF THE GREY KANGAROO (*Macropus ocydromus*)

By DOROTHY M. BEECK, Katanning.

On January 20, 1955, I saw one of our tame Grey Kangaroos give birth to a "joey". It was about 11 a.m. as I went out to the clothes-line and noticed the peculiar attitude of the old doe. She was sitting far back on her tail and haunches, and I thought she was paralysed or sick. As she was very close to the fence, I was able to observe her from the distance of about one yard. She did not attempt to move as I went near.

Her arms were rigid with hands hanging, and her tongue was going in and out rapidly. The abdomen twinged frequently (apparently labour), and very soon a small sac appeared at the vent and dropped to the ground. This sac was about three-quarters of an inch in diameter, and seemed to consist of a very thin transparent skin containing a small amount of yellowish fluid. It was preceded by drops of blood.

As soon as the sac had fallen, the joey, a small, pink, hairless, worm-like creature about 1½ inches long, emerged from the vent head-first and held on. It quickly turned upwards and began to climb into the fur, pulling upwards from side to side, using its arms only, straight towards the opening of the pouch. The doe stayed motionless and did not look at the joey or her pouch.

The joey climbed quickly and unaided up to the mouth of the pouch, reaching it in about two minutes. The fur between the pouch and the vent was quite dry before the ascent of the joey, but as it climbed it left a wet trail. At the mouth of the pouch the joey rested a few moments and then went slowly over the top and down into the pouch cavity. As it went into the pouch (where the skin lining must be very sensitive) it probably aroused some feeling in the doe, for she now began to take interest for the first time. She seemed excited, looked down at the pouch opening, then up, then down again, and began to lick the entrance. The doe then held it open with her hands and looked in, then she licked and looked in from time to time for about 20 minutes. During this time I presume the joey was endeavouring to affix itself to a teat. The doe did not appear to put her hand (or hands) right into the pouch to help the joey.

After all this the doe very shakily moved a little farther away and laid down. After that she was often observed licking around the pouch area. (With other does having pouch young we have often noticed that they often hold the pouch open with their hands while they lick the inside of the pouch clean.)

For some years now we have had kangaroos in captivity, but this is the first time that this old doe has bred, though we have had her for 8 years. We do not know the gestation period exactly, but about 7 weeks before the birth of the joey, we saw her mating with the tamest buck. Normally she did not mix with our other seven kangaroos, but there were signs of a friendship with this buck before the mating was seen. Although mating was seen once, we don't know how often it occurred.